

# H4 Consulting Brief

## The Right Track

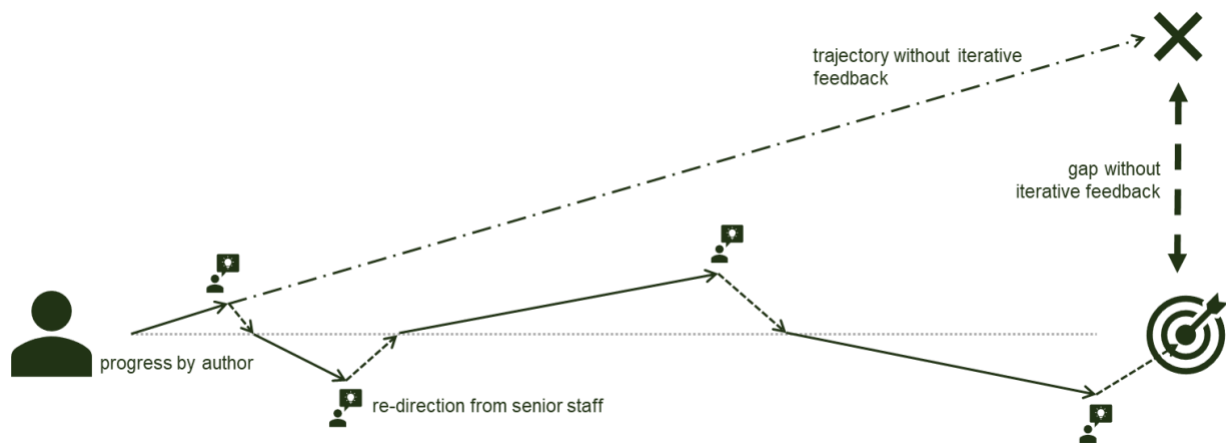
Time and effort are wasted in publicly funded organisations by senior people redoing the work of less senior people, or less senior people trying again and again. It's a production line. An order comes down and goes through the whole production line, to deliver a finished product. If the product is not right, then a busy executive does it themselves or the whole process starts over, just as likely to go all the way down the wrong track again.

Executives and managers in large organisations are often spread thinly across big portfolios. They have limited time to give clear instructions and progressive feedback to staff in the early stages of drafting, and so are more likely to receive completed, polished documents that are not fit for purpose. Often, they will redo the work personally, which becomes one of the reasons senior staff are so busy.

Junior staff are often hesitant to ask for guidance early in the process, because they want to produce work they're proud of before asking for direction. In this production line model, staff are rewarded for efficiency and aim for as little intervention from senior staff as possible. The onus is on the author of the work to find the right path to a completed, perfect document.

However, the work in publicly funded organisations is complex and rarely works well as a production line. Without early and frequent guidance, staff often lack the contextual or content knowledge to produce the right product. If executives and managers redo the work without sharing that information, then staff may never gain that knowledge or learn those skills, and frustrated executives who are already stretched beyond capacity spend even more time redoing work. It becomes a vicious cycle in which executives complain about staff not seeing the bigger picture, while only sharing information one small task at a time.

Wasted time and effort can also be demoralising for staff, who genuinely put in their best efforts, only to have their work largely, or entirely, scrapped.



A design thinking approach is a better metaphor than a production line for most work in publicly funded organisations. Design approaches get to the right answer by testing ideas iteratively in earlier, faster bursts. Decision makers get involved more often, but for less time overall, by nudging staff progressively closer to the right track. This both improves the capability of staff over time, and reduces or eliminates the need for rework.

To make this work, organisations need to agree ways of working that encourage frequent, but light touch communication and feedback between levels. Even just clearly defining and confirming the destination—the context, purpose, and audience for a product—can make a big difference to the enthusiasm of junior staff and the quality of their drafts.

An iterative approach, with frequent feedback from executives, helps staff to deliver the right product the first time. Although this means more work for senior staff early in the process, it saves a lot of time, effort, and frustration at the end of the process. It is also an opportunity for promising staff to develop the contextual knowledge and skills to be future leaders.

With a good grasp of the destination, scope, and purpose of their work, staff are in a better position to understand what is expected of them. They produce, with early and frequent feedback, work that is much closer to target, is more satisfying for authors, and requires less rework from executives. Small investments of time and effort up front can save a lot of angst at all levels later, by making sure the work starts out and stays on, or close to, the right track.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: [info@h4consulting.com.au](mailto:info@h4consulting.com.au)  
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